

Building Bridges of Faith: EVALUATION

Cross-cultural exchanges are by no means straightforward! Cultural norms - or at least expectations - can often be quite different depending on the countries involved. Many crucial lessons were learned during this project. In general, what is required for a well-run & functioning programme were relevant in this case - for example:

- clear aims which are also understood by the project participants;
- supportive & strong leadership with good support from all team members;
- adequate teambuilding;
- sufficient time to rest & relax;
- ground rules which encourage a respectful & encouraging atmosphere within the group.

In particular, the need for teambuilding both within each country group & with the whole team is essential. The logistical complexity of our project was huge. What can happen is that for budget & practical reasons (length of time participants can devote to the project), a schedule can end up becoming rather punishing. Each spiritual site offers an incredible experience: so much is there to be learned & shared, but the "fatigue factor" because of jetlag & basic tiredness can become overwhelming, and affect the ability of the participants to function effectively & be able to appreciate all that's on offer. This must be taken into consideration by planners & hosts.

In evaluating the whole experience, the pilgrims themselves had some positive reflections on how they had been moved:

- "...my view was broadened by talking with religious people rather than learning religions".
- " I learned a lot about new religions and religious beliefs.....and have begun to dream about how I can be my own vehicle for change".
- "I could meet amazing people who were really kind. I thought that religious people were wonderful."
- "It has allowed me to find my own personal idea of faith and realize spiritual practice in my daily life. This feels like a beginning to me and not the ending of an experience".
- "...to hear that other members are also thinking about peace and religion seriously".
- "Each type of worship was fascinating in its own way because religion is a mystery".
- "It was also influential seeing the tendency of American culture and English language to dominate situations and to begin thinking about how to conduct successful mediation and dialogue in the future".
- (A Japanese member) "The Misogi was really memorable for me(also) the Jewish worship which I found so enjoyable".
- (An American member) "I thought that the program, especially the time in Japan was absolutely incredible, wonderful, awesome."
- "...this experience is going to influence how I live my life in future. As the goal of this programme is really so big, I would like to make an effort towards it..."